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www.teambetterblock.com

Photo Acknowledgements:

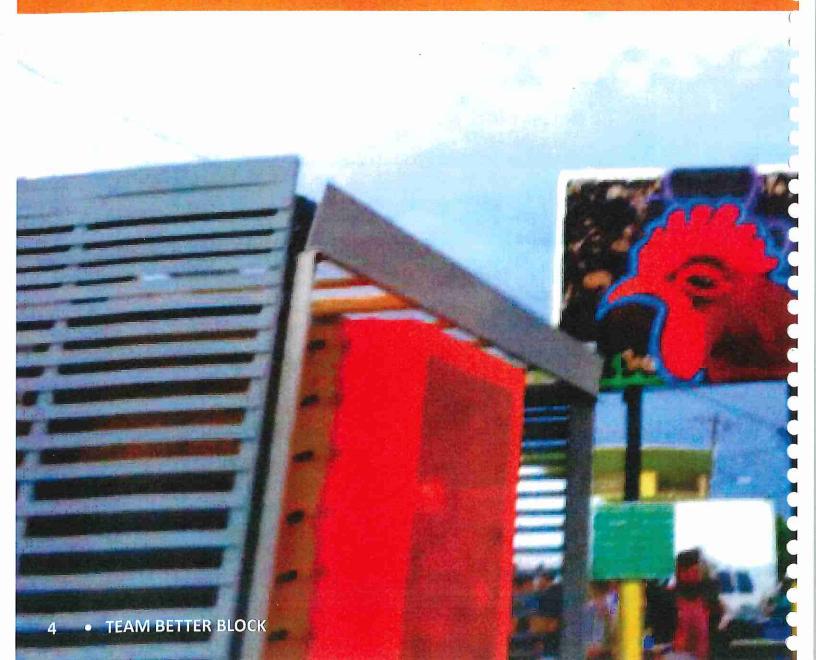
Virginian Pilot Paul Costen Kelsie McNair

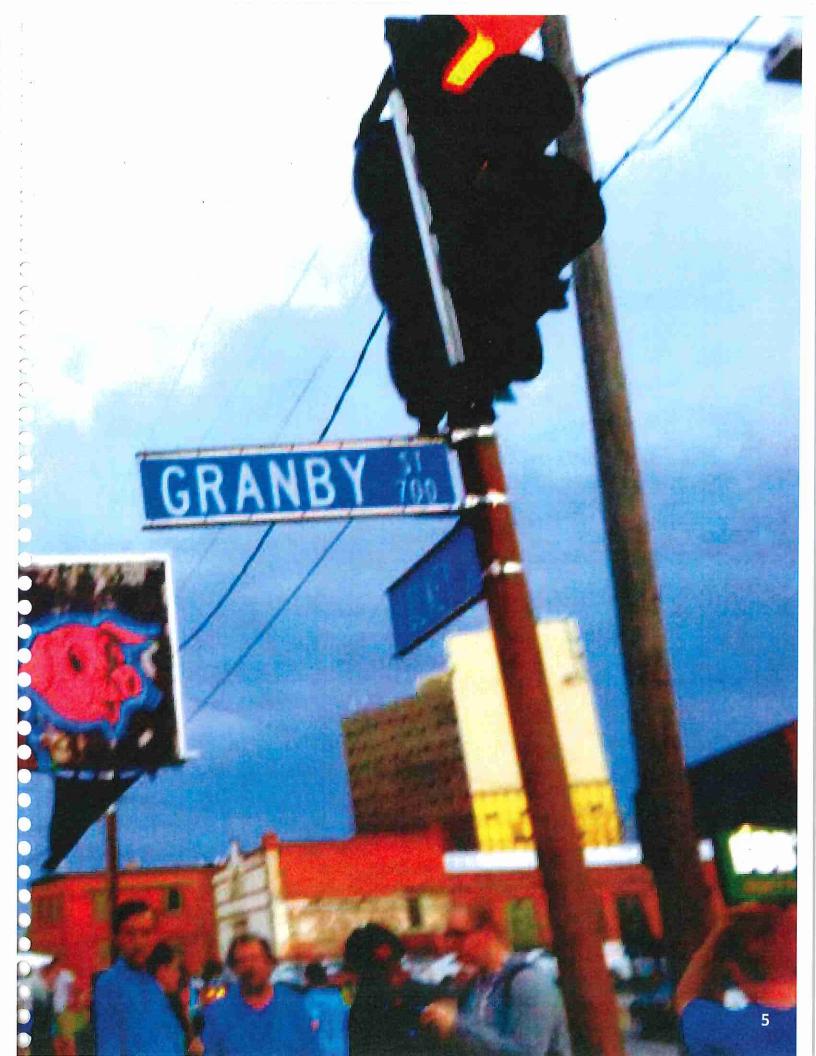
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### Introduction

In the spring of 2013, Team Better Block partnered with the City of Norfolk, VA and over one hundred and thirty volunteers and community leaders for the Norfolk Better Block. The project built on planning and energy to establish the Downtown Art and Design District (DADD) and acted as a training session for all Norfolk residents to learn Better Block techniques for rapid revitalization. This report is a review of the project with recommendations for next steps to continue the momentum developed during the Norfolk Better Block.



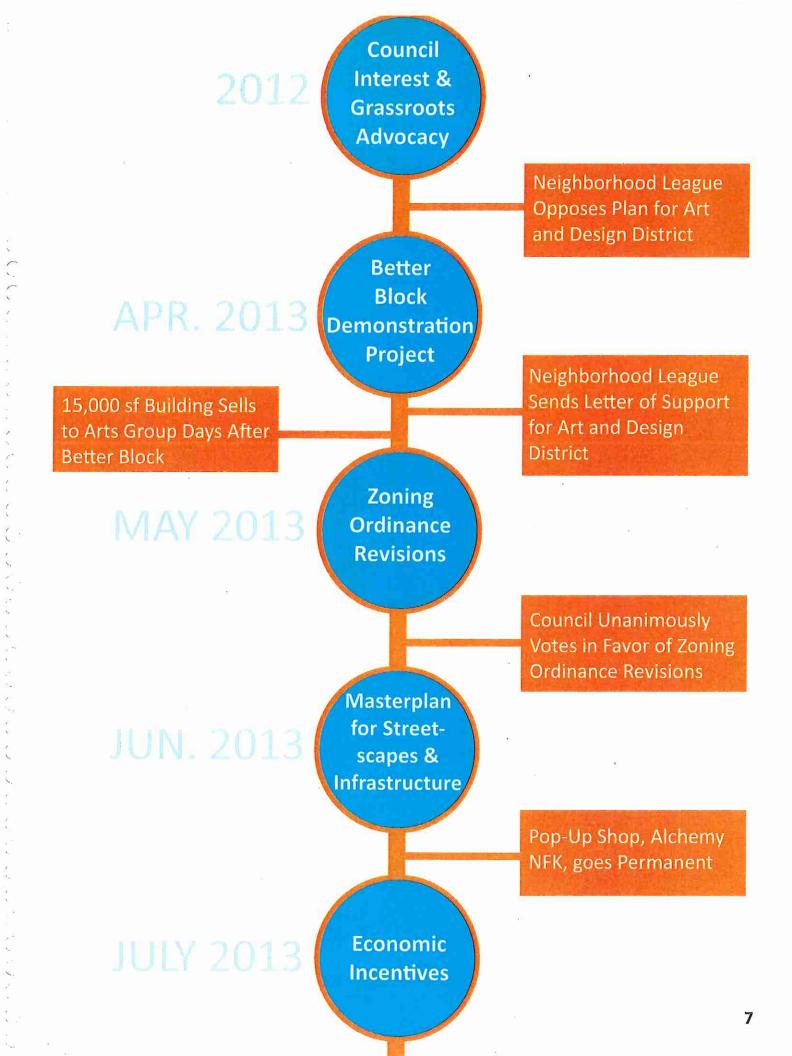


### Downtown Art & Design District

### Better Block Energizing the Masterplan

Significant community and city effort had been put into establishing an Arts District. In July of 2012, a group seeking non-profit status drafted a vision to stimulate the cultural and economic life throughout the Hampton Roads region through the development and promotion of the Norfolk Emerging Arts District. The creation of an Arts District was discussed at a City Council retreat in September of 2012. Nevertheless, many questions remained about how the district would look, where is the best place to get started and how much should be planned or left to organic development?

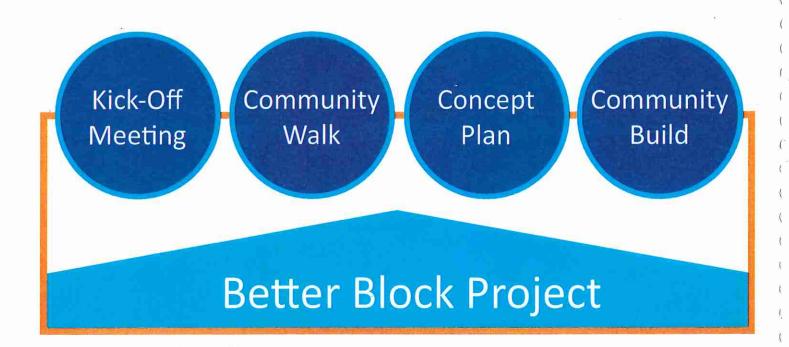
The pace of the planning process was energized because of hundreds of citizens being involved, thus the project moved from concept, to zoning, to infrastructure plan and incentive package in months. Other cities have spent decades and millions of dollars (see Dallas, TX) on the creation of an Arts District. The Better Block reinforced what was already being envisioned by the community, allowed city staff to focus on creating the regulatory mechanism, expedited infrastructure design and justified the need for economic incentives. Norfolk is a model for how to efficiently plan an Arts District and implement it in days, not years!



### The Better Block Process

Progress in days, not years

The Better Block process takes a bottom-up approach to planning, allowing the community direct involvement with rapid build-out and construction of revitalization projects. The Better Block replaces the traditional public meeting with a living charrette that is built by the community to represent the future condition of a place. Instead of consultant generated renderings, the community builds installations of public spaces and retrofitted streets. Worst-case scenario assumptions of development scenarios are replaced with pop-up shops crafted by budding entrepreneurs. Additionally, long-term planning is aided by the Better Block process, as public space improvements, street modifications and zoning changes are tested and proven before put in place. The following steps built the knowledge and human capital needed for the Norfolk Better Block:



### Kick-Off Meeting and Orientation - January 24, 2013

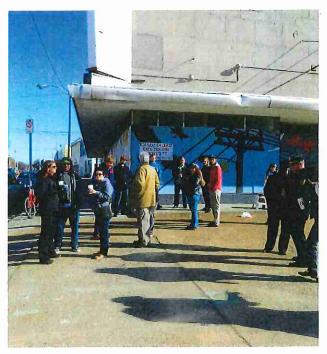
At the early stages of the Better Block, a public meeting was held to invite individuals and organizations to take part in the project being led by the City. A strong turnout occurred for the Arts District with multiple groups pledging to take ownership of various elements of the proposed project. After much consideration by Team Better Block and the City of Norfolk, the area of North Granby Street from Olney to Addison was chosen for the Better Block site. This area had all the elements of a successful Better Block:

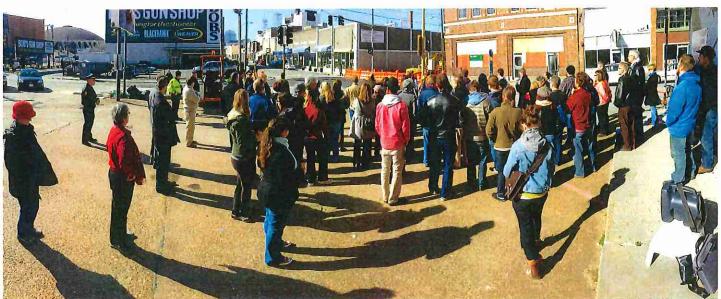
- 1. Urban Form (buildings to the street, parking in the rear and permeable storefronts).
- 2. An eager community that is ready for change.
- 3. A street that can be improved by reducing automobile dominance.
- 4. Potential for placemaking (space for public art, public plazas and shops with a unique character).
- 5. Existing special events in area, such as Meet and Greet on Granby, that provide a platform for the Better Block to build upon.

### Community Walk - February 8, 2013

Getting out of town hall and onto the streets is key for the Better Block success. Over 150 people participated in the community walk. The walk uncovered ideas for making it easier to walk, bike and ride transit. Participants formed groups focused on creating public art, pop-up shops and adding to the streetlife. Ideas from the community walk served as the basis for the concept plan shown on the following page.







### Concept Plan - April 5, 2013

The concept plan establishes a strategy to balance the use of the street between pedestrians, bicycles and autos, and allocate space for pop-up shops, public plazas and public art installations.



### Community Build - April 9-11, 2013

Multiple teams established during the community walk set forth to buildout the elements described in the concept plan at the community build. The community build activities started weeks before the event, but the lasting relationships and social capital created by the project will pay dividends for years to come.

#### The owners of the project include:

Nadira Al darra Alison Alexander John Alford Julie Alvarado Phyllis Armistead Rose Armour Don August Vanessa August Vicki Bahr **Brendan Barsness** Sonya Barsness Paul Behson Atsuko Biernot Terri Boone Brian Booth

Debra Burrell Chelsy Carter Fli Cecil Jennifer Chapman Kelvin Coles

Suzanna Brugler

Christina Condon Jeff Conkle Scott Cramer VC Crisostomo **Kevin Curry** Jessy Davis

Sean Devereux Marissa DiGirolamo Gayle Donovan Ari Durall

Courtney Ellard Megan Ellis

Michael Evans Chip Finch

Elmie Lynn Flores John Flowers

Sean Foster Kellam Galleries Cindy Garza

Karl Giles Tamaria Green Ashley Grove

Darcy Guerricagoitia

Joe Hamm Dennis Harrison Sally Hartman Maurice Hawkins Michael Hodge Isabella Hodge

Michael Hodge Mary Howell Mike Hull

**Blount Hunter** Tolu Ibikunle Melisa Ingram Michelle Johnson

Caoilte Joy Athena Karn Walter Kloth Seshi Konu Kasey Krall Brian Ledwell Jason Leidy David Lentzner Kelly Longoria

Mike Mars Kelsie Mcnair Aria Meier

Damian Mendoza Corey Miller Benjamin Mills

Byron Morgan Pam Morrow Jonathan Nye

Ryan O'Grady Michelle Odom

Nicole Pandeloglou

Sarah Parker

Mark and Ginger Perron

David Phillips Bob Pursell. Christy Pursell Robert Pursell The Pushers Elizabeth Reed Andrew Richard Vaughn Rinner Ju'nell Robinson

Jason Roberts Nancy Rogan James Rogers Daniel Rojas Jose Roman Kristen Runberg Regina Sanford

Abigail Santmyer

Louie Sawi Hannah Serreno Bonnie Schule Adam Schuman

Jp Semper Julie Shaffer Rachel Shames **Matthew Simons** 

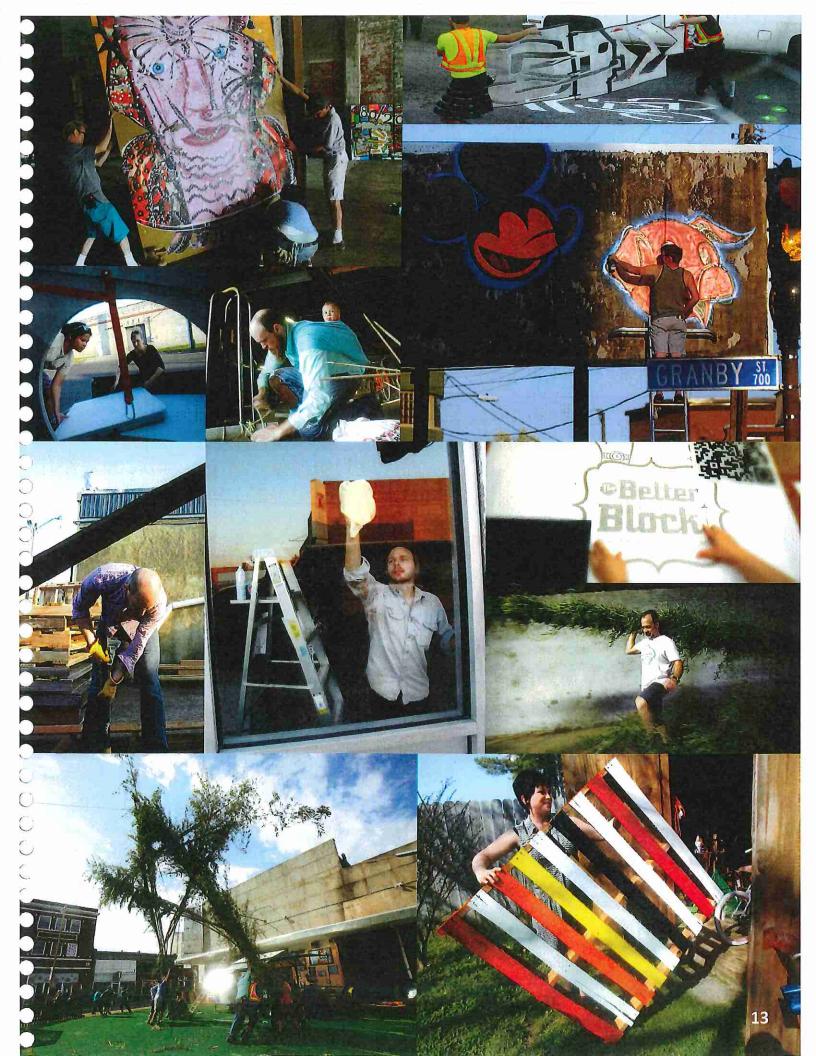
Scott Slay **David Smith** Ryan. Snow Sarah Snow

Corey & LaQuita Staten

Jen Stringer Ken Suddith **Ginny Summerlin** Melissa Taylor Sean Thomas Trisha Tobias Ceindy Ton **Andrew Tonra** Jermaine Vega Ava Vollbrecht Charles Walbrook Jane Wallingford

Jaime Ware Catherine Weaver Markus Wegener Careyann Weinberg LaTerika Wesley Mary Westbrook Roberto Westbrook

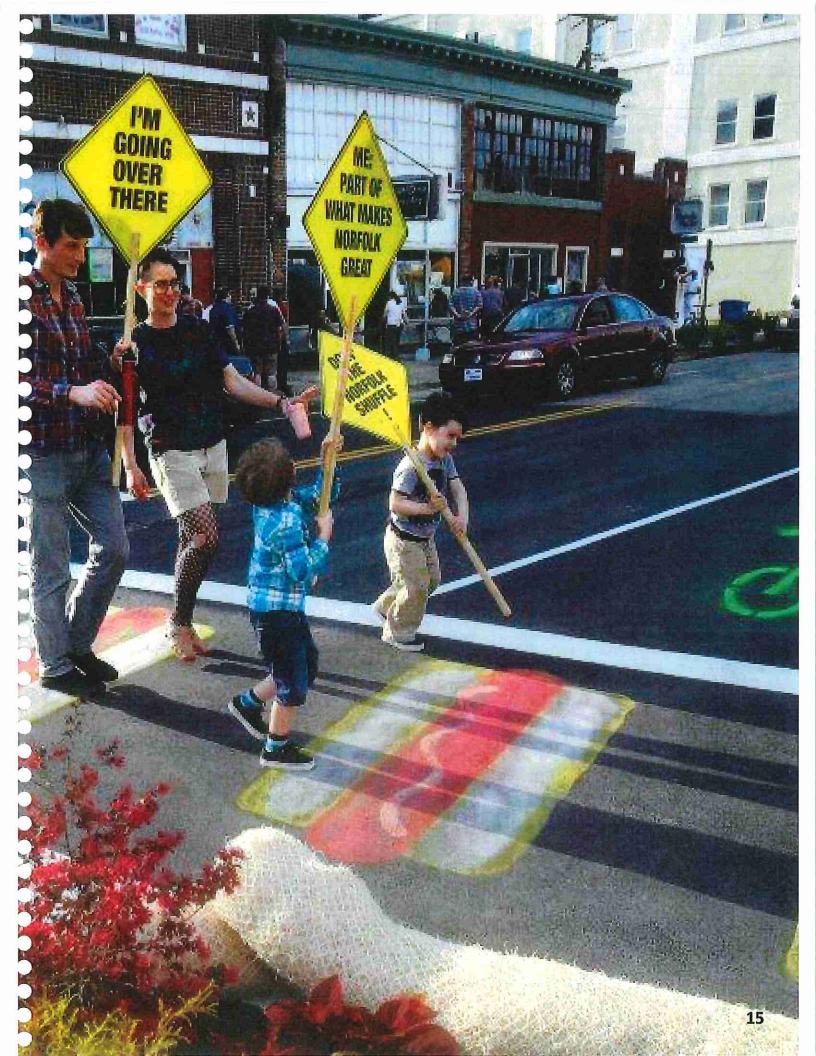
John Wharton MJ Wilfong Tina Wright Kyle Zeltmann





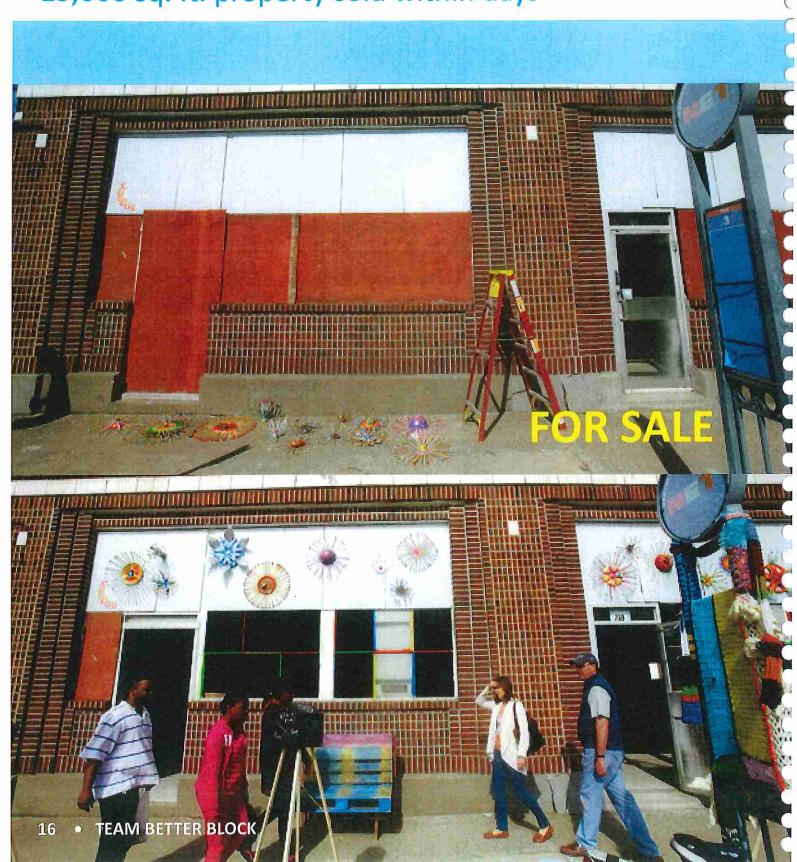
### The Better Block - April 12-13, 2013

The Better Block created a living charrette for the future Downtown Art and Design District. In place of a public meeting, crowds at the Better Block numbering in the thousands, represented strong community support for permanent change. Over a few days, citizens, city officials and Team Better Block Staff daylighted vacant property, incubated retail, strengthened existing businesses, made a street safe for all and created a vibrant public space.

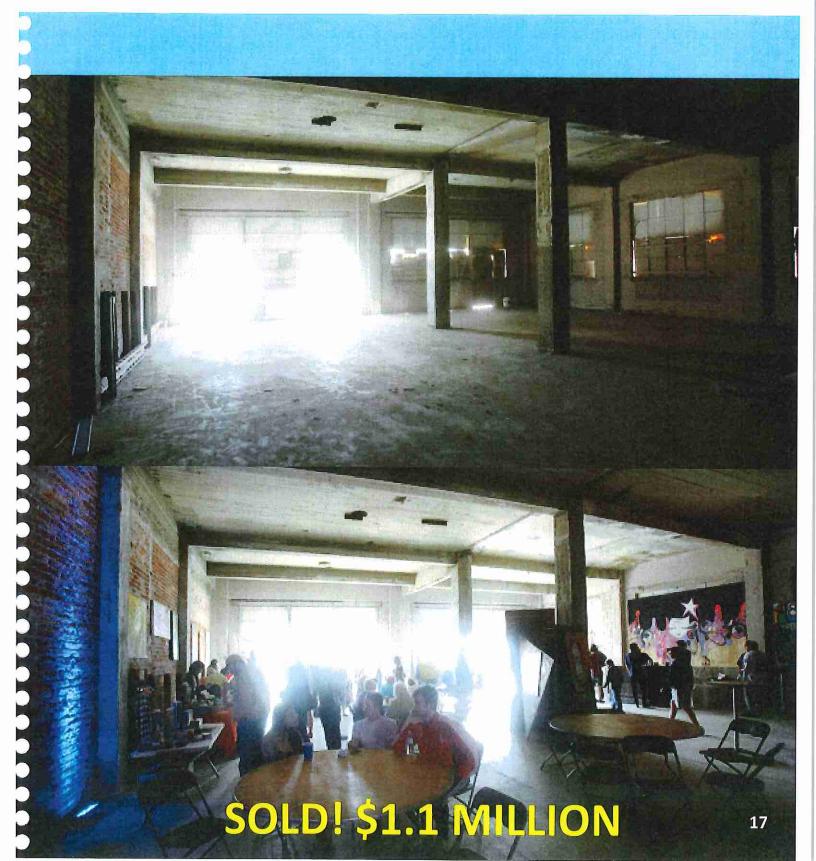


### **Daylighting Vacant Property**

15,000 sq. ft. property sold within days

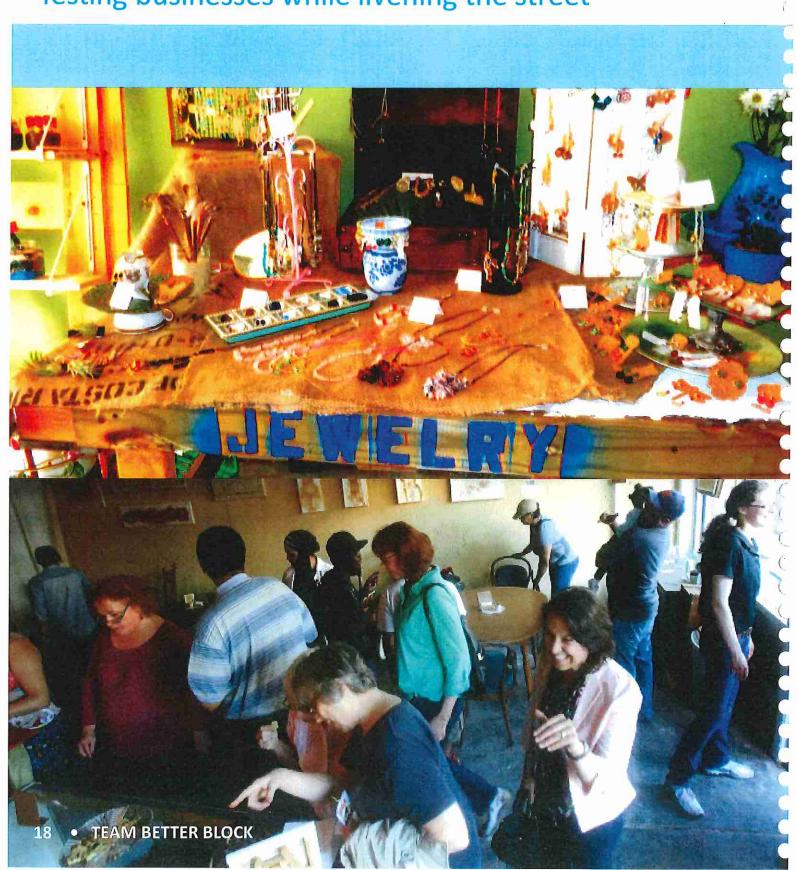


The once boarded-up yet iconic Texaco Building was daylighted by volunteers with the cooperation of the property owner and the CBRE listing agent. The community added public art, live music, sketch comedy, art classes, and a beer garden to activate and showcase the space. The temporary make-over served as an open house giving new buyers a vision of what could be. The property was sold the very next week after being on the market for several years.

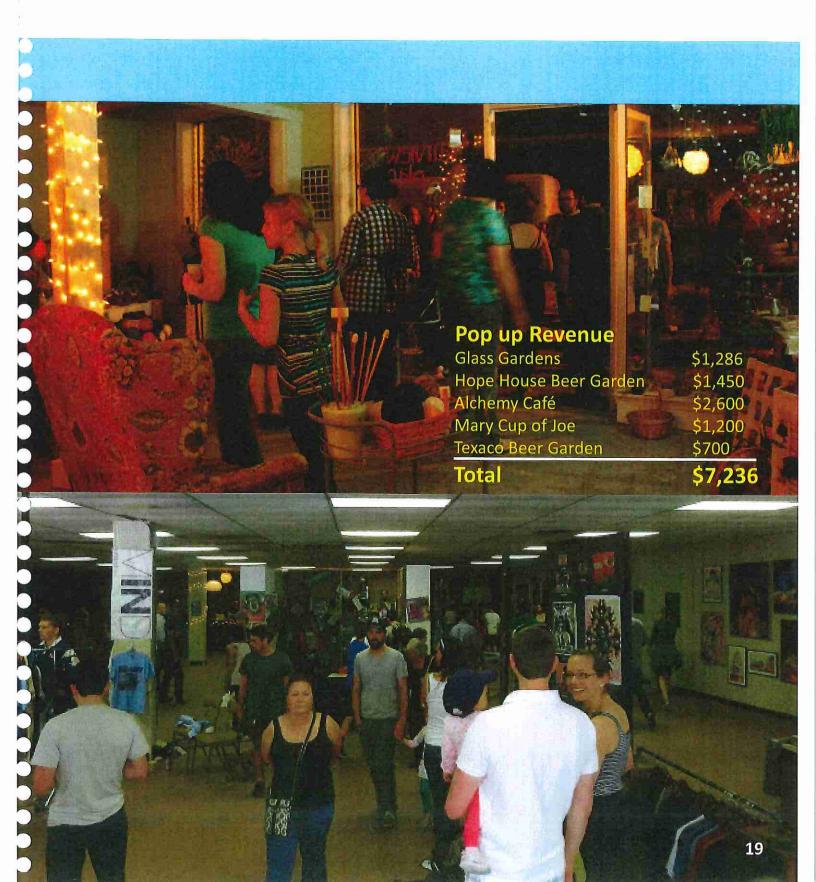


## Pop-Up Retail

Testing businesses while livening the street

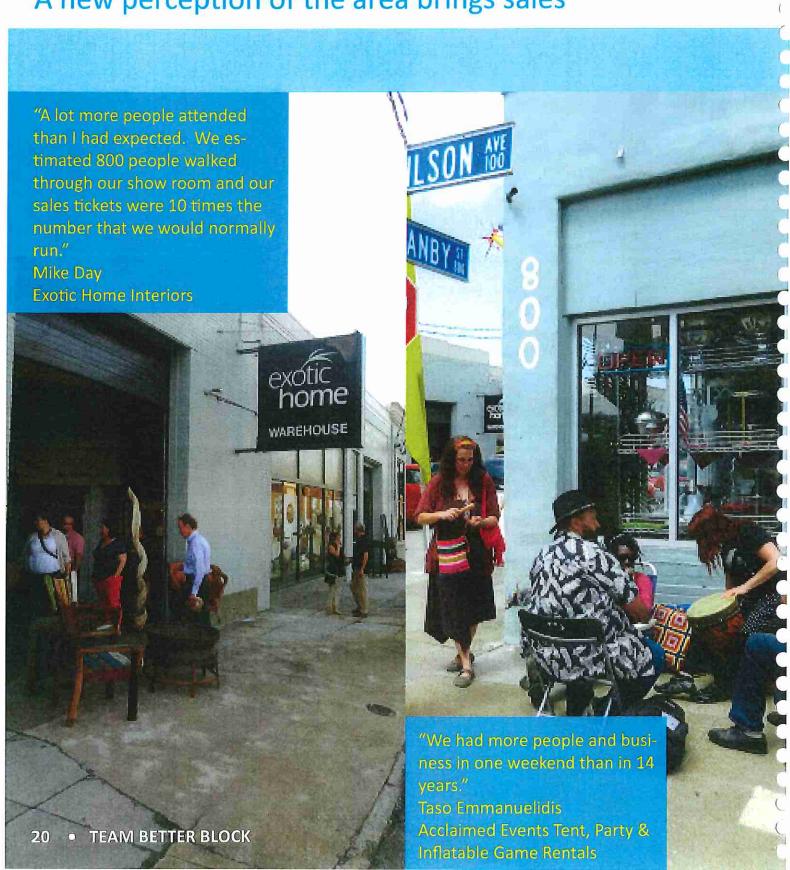


Authenticity of a place, not only comes from the physical environment, but also from the little shops lining the street. Better Block demonstrated the pent up demand for small business incubation in Norfolk and highlighted the rich creative talent of its people. The pop-up retail showed how to reuse buildings to match the budding hyper-local start-up economy.



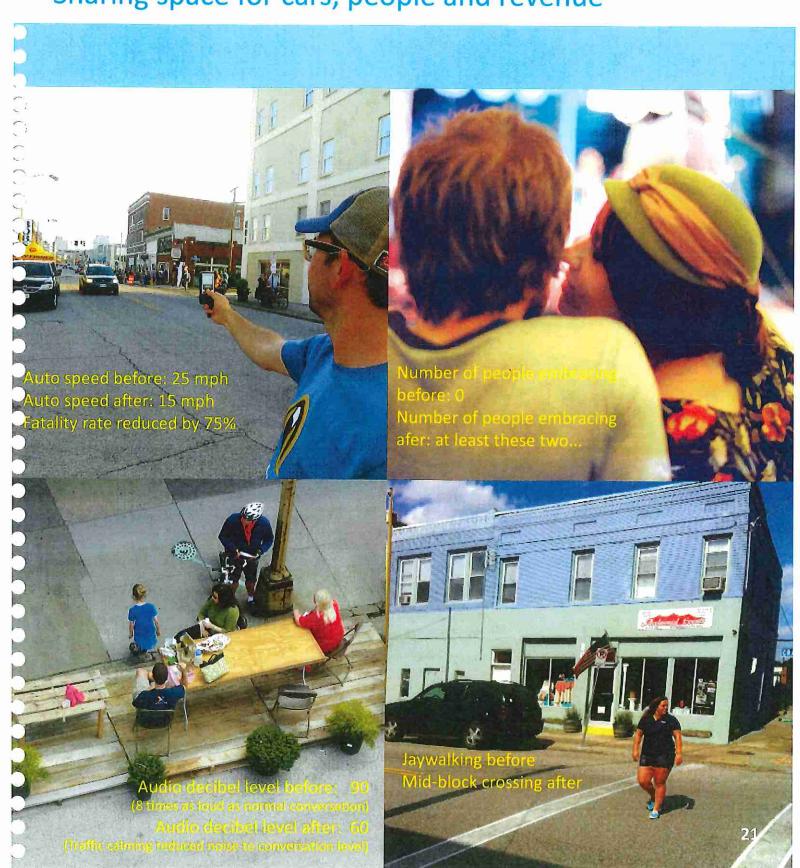
### Impact on Existing Businesses

A new perception of the area brings sales



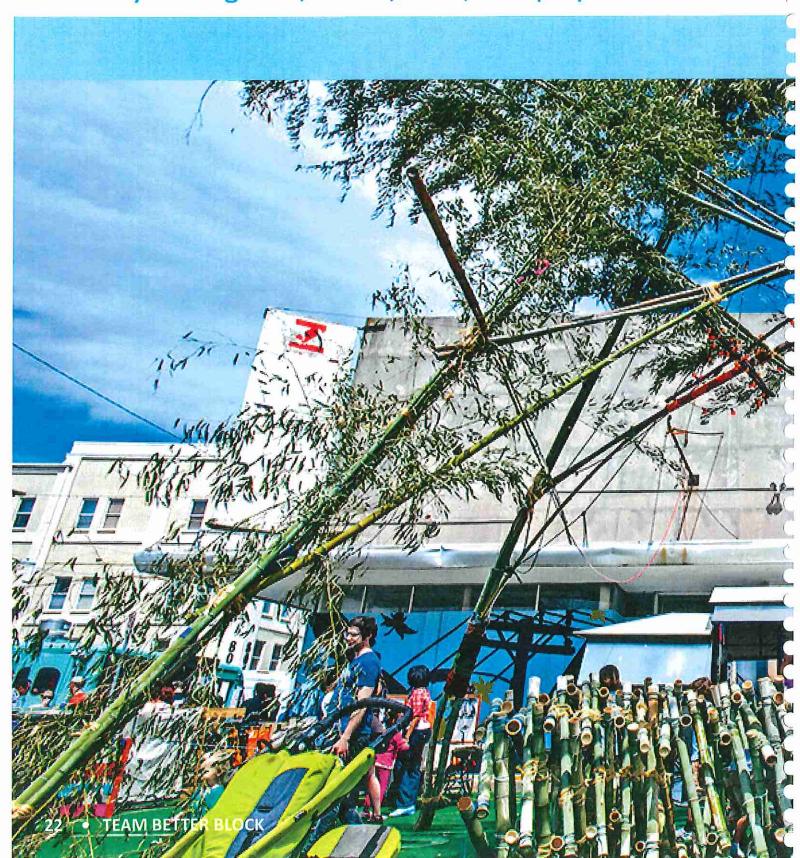
### **Complete Streets**

Sharing space for cars, people and revenue

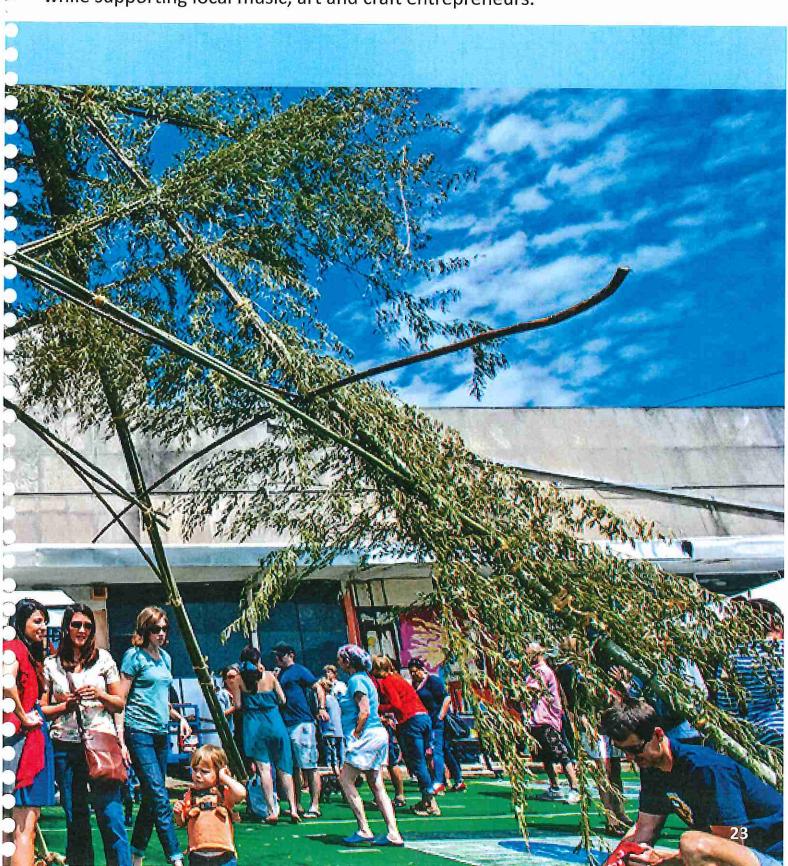


### **Public Plaza**

Identity through art, music, food, and play

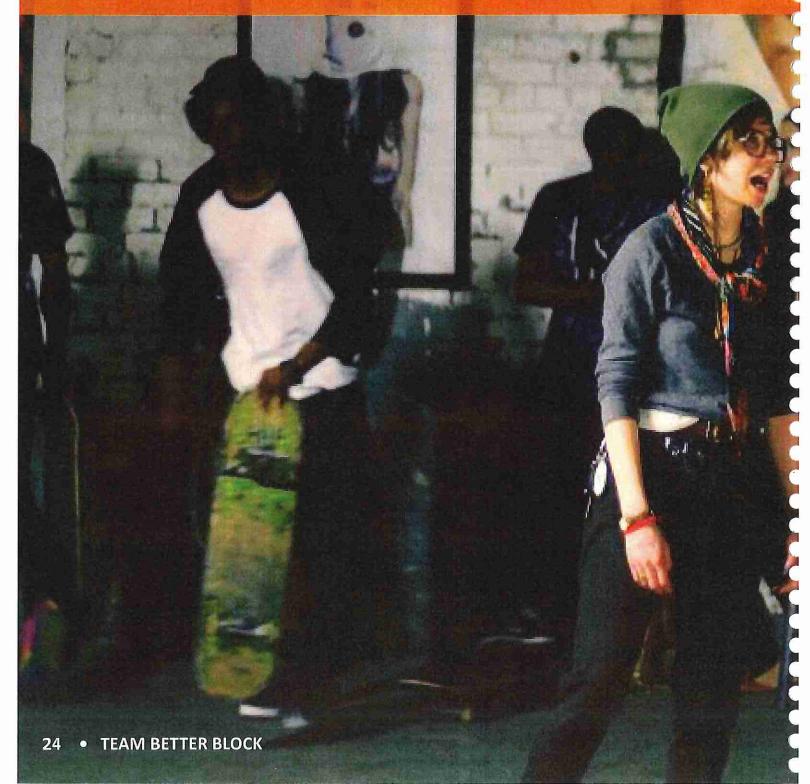


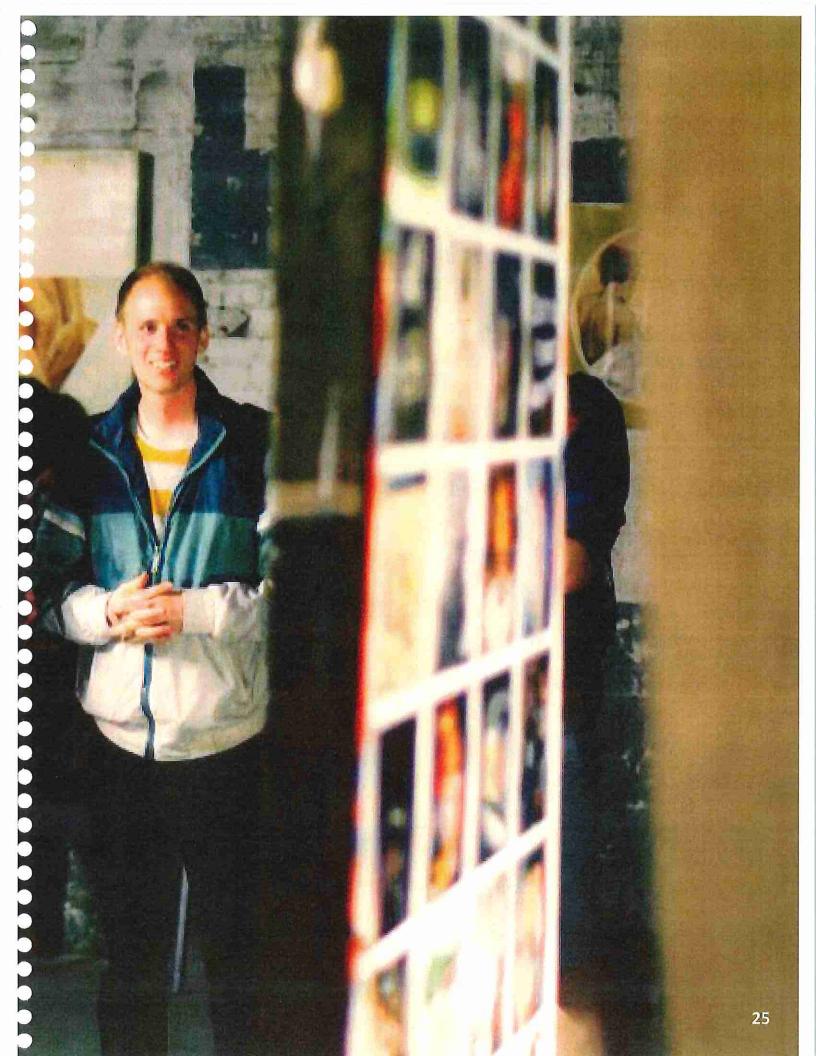
Led by members of Re Vision Norfolk and Bike Norfolk, a parking lot was converted into a public space with art exhibitons, studios, a live music stage, beer garden, passive play items, and micro retail opportunities. Reclaimed turf from a city soccer field provided the foundation, and a towering bamboo pagoda shaded the space. This raised the community's awareness about the long term potential for the site while supporting local music, art and craft entrepreneurs.





The key to realizing a vibrant Arts District within a year relies on three actions: programming, improvements to the physical environment and business development.





#### **Programming**

In order to continue to build upon the success of the Better Block project, it is key to continue programming the area and incrementally adding improvements that help bring more residents and visitors to the area while promoting the idea of an Arts District as a major destination. Places that embrace quality outdoor environments rapidly receive returns on their investment as perceptions of the area change. Café seating, landscaping, and paint alone can help dramatically change an environment from cold and desolate to alive and active. It's important to not be discouraged if early events have smaller turnouts as you are still building momentum and narrative for the area. We've seen a trend where first events have 100-300 attendees only, second events have 500 – 1000 visitors, and by the third the area has been completely re-activated. Below is an assortment of event ideas that will help maintain the Better Block's momentum:

- Food truck rally
- Free outdoor movies
- Art and design classes
- Concerts in the Plaza (from chamber music to rock and roll)
- Long table events
- Wedding walk and shop

At least one event should be programmed every quarter in the District. Similar to Better Block, these should be coordinated with the community, property owners, Downtown Norfolk and Norfolk Meet and Greet on Granby.

#### Physical Environment

Stop planning and take action! One of the greatest challenges for the Arts District area is implementing ideas. The traditional planning process lends itself to endless discussion of possibilities with the inevitable end product being a lack of consensus on permanent changes. With that being said, there are immediate steps that can be taken to return people to the area and encourage a greater sense of place. These include converting on-street parking to cafes, outdoor markets and long term pop-up shops, while allowing food vendors greater access to the space.

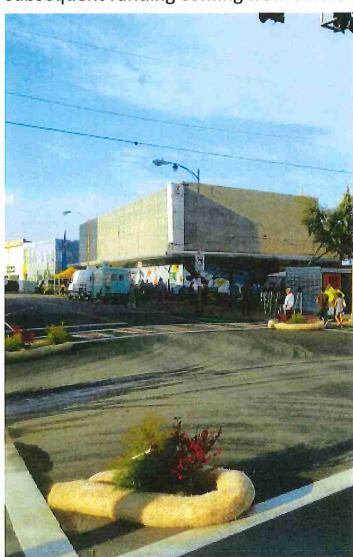
The following recommendations could all be undertaken at one-time but should be implemented before the time deadline.

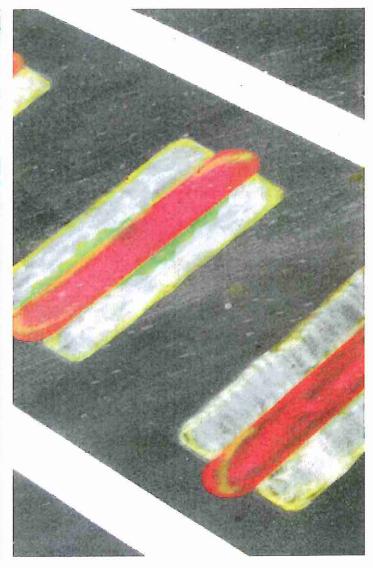


### 30 Days - Paint the Pavement Pilot Program

Paint the pavement projects bring the community together to provide identity and color to drab city streets. The result is greater community ownership of public space and calmed traffic.

During the Better Block the intersection of Granby @ Olney was painted by artists. Continue this by creating a Paint the Pavement Pilot Program that allows community organizations to apply to paint public streets. Public works and property owners would approve designs and the applicant organization would pledge to re-paint yearly. Proceeds from beer sales at the Better Block could fund the first year, with subsequent funding coming from future events in the District.

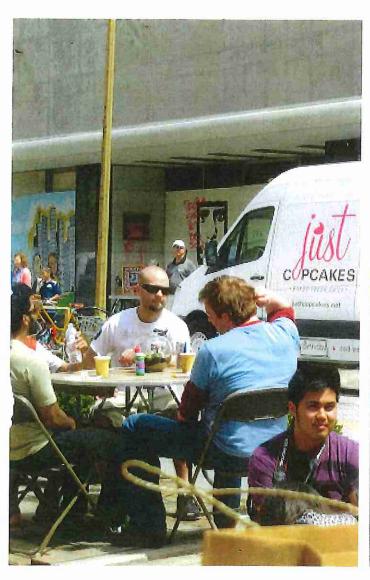




### 60 Days - Parklet Program

Parklets can catalyze vitality and activity in Norfolk commercial districts. They support local business communities by encouraging pedestrians to linger.

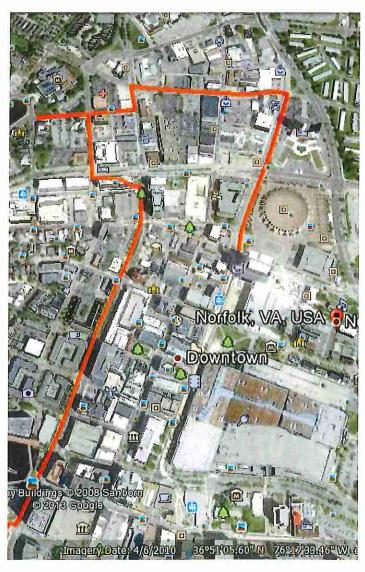
The Better Block demonstrated how a few parking spaces can be temporarily changed to provide amenities and green space for people using the street. Parklets provide places to sit, park a bike, wait on transit and greenery, art or some other visual amenity. A parklet may be thought of as permanent, but must be designed for quick and easy removal for emergencies or other reasons such as snow removal without damage to the curb or street.

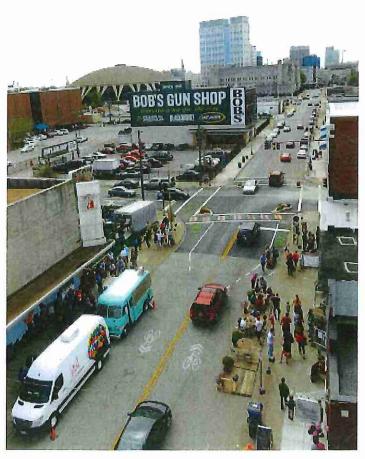




#### 90 Days - Open Streets

Open streets initiatives temporarily close streets to automobile traffic, so that people may use them for walking, bicycling, dancing, playing, and socializing. Past Meet and Greet events demonstrated the desire for streets to be closed for events. Better Block showed the importance of connecting neighborhoods to downtown events. Open Streets will physically connect neighborhoods to the downtown and provide a means for demonstrating how future bicycle infrastructure can spur economic development and improve quality of life.





### 120 Days - Pilot Bicycle Lanes

Install bicycle lanes and signage on key streets using water based paint for a three month trial. Take ideas from the Better Block and the soon to be released streets-cape master plan and trial the projects for three months. Working with public works, design bike lanes for streets that were used during the open streets. Mix city staff and community volunteers to implement the temporary project. Use coroplast signs to mimic MUTCD signs. Community groups need to measure how many people use the lanes and city staff should monitor for safety and make incremental changes to improve the design. At the conclusion of the 120 days a meeting should be held to compare usage, safety and next steps.

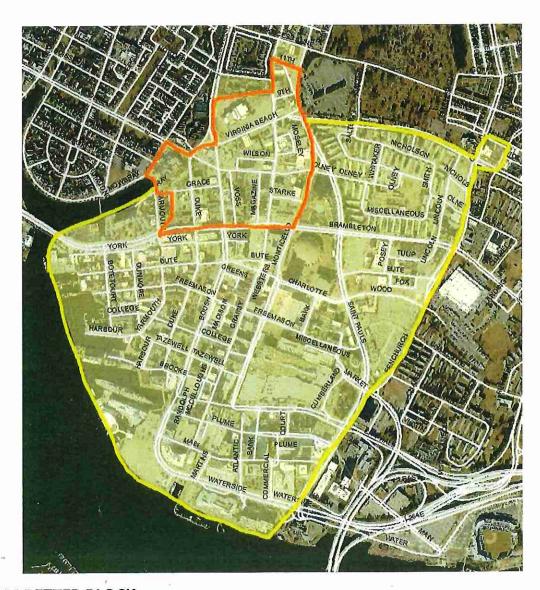






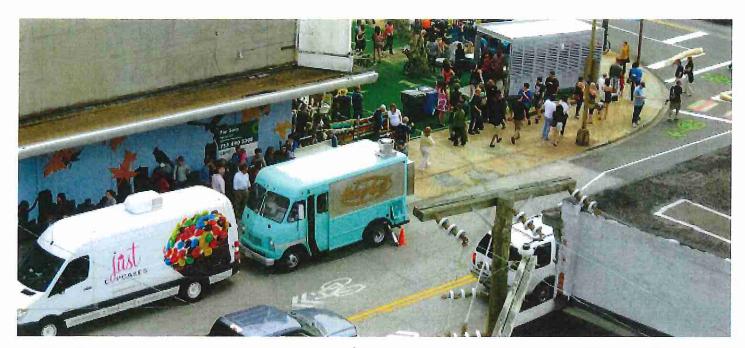
### **Business Development**

Norfolk is missing an opportunity to attract and retain talent in the city because of outdated business licence and permitting requirements. The new economy thrives on entrepreneurs, start-ups, pop-up retail shops and mobile businesses having flexibility in location and duration of business licences. Better permits and licences will allow artists, designers, creatives, makers and doers to focus more on what they're good at - creating great businesses - while allowing city planners to focus on their own invaluable strengths - navigating the crucial regulatory nuances of City Hall that can make these projects a reality. The city should create a retail incubator program based on the following recommendations:



### 30 Days - Food Trucks

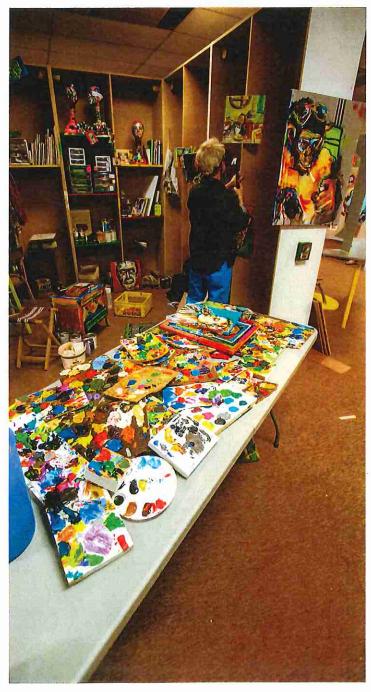
To provide lower cost food, incubate small business and activate underused vacant lots. Hundreds of employees are within walking distance of the Better Block site on a daily basis. Providing food within walking distance and basic comforts like seating will induce more safety and activity in the area.

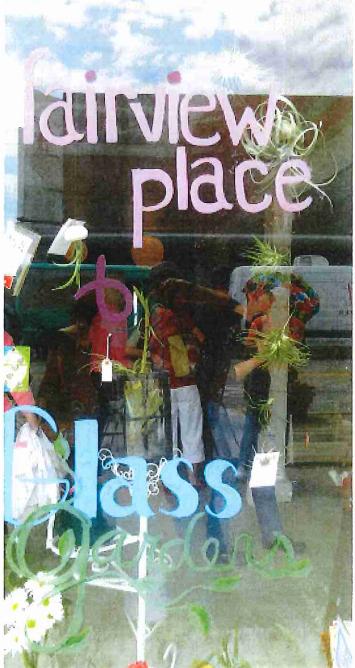




### 60 Days - Pop-Up Retail

Promote the use of vacant or underused storefronts and vacant lots for temporary retail shops. Create a mechanism for retail spaces to open under temporary permission, similar to seasonal shops, that is easy to navigate. Permit kiosks in the public right of way.





### 90 Days - Site Pre-vitalization

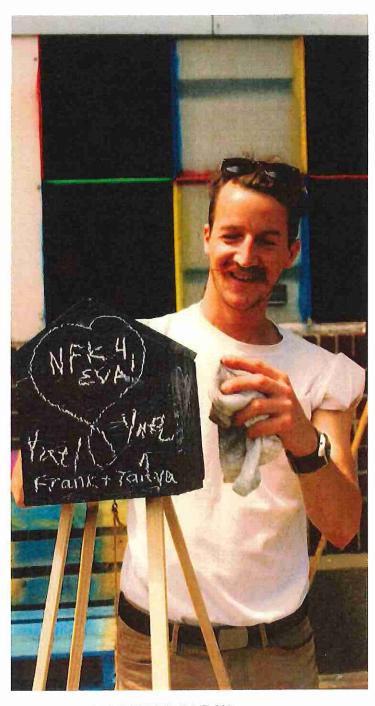
Is the temporary reactivation of a previously inactive, underutilized parcel of land. This tactic was demonstrated during the Better Block when art, food, beverage and retail uses were all brought to the former Zedds parking lot. In this vacant lot or another continue previtalization by working with the existing property owner to build momentum for development, incubate business, fund public space improvements and build community.



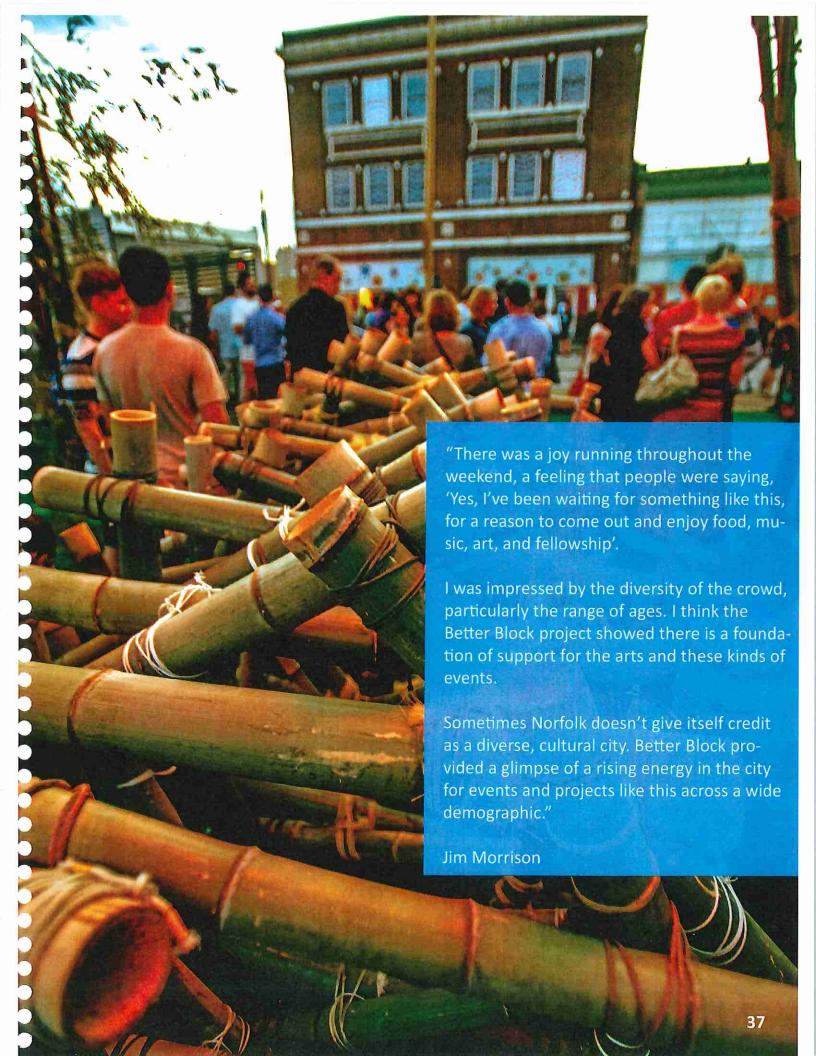


### 120 Days - Pop-Up Town Hall

Hold a city council meeting on-site of the proposed Arts District and invite community members to illustrate ideas for public art, businesses and improvements to the area.









Norfolk has all the talent and resources it requires to be better today. This plan provides one hundred and twenty days worth of actions. The Better Block reinforced that if community and City work together, they can achieve their goals in days, not years.

Congratulations, Norfolk! Your city and citizens are Better Block certified.



